

horticulture

for the home gardener

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HOME VEGETABLE GARDENING CALENDAR FOR SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



Few areas can surpass Southern California in the number of different vegetables that can be grown in the home garden. Delicious home-grown vegetables may be harvested on a year-round basis by following a monthly schedule of planting and by selecting the proper types of vegetables for the season.

Vegetables can be grouped according to their ideal growing season: cool season, warm season, and all-year crops. Cool-season vegetables require cool day and night temperatures to mature properly; they flower and produce seed prematurely if exposed to prolonged periods of hot weather. This occurrence, called "bolting," may also result in vegetables which are tough and bitter tasting. Cool-season crops will tolerate light frosts of short duration. Cabbage and its relatives -- broccoli, cauliflower, and kohlrabi -- are examples of this type.

Warm-season crops require a long period of warm air and soil temperatures to grow and ripen fruit properly. These vegetables are frost tender and will often rot or become stunted in cold, wet weather. Warm-season crops include beans, corn, tomatoes and their relatives, eggplant and peppers.

Southern California's mild Mediterranean climate is suitable for growing some vegetables all year round. The all-year crops are those vegetables which will grow and mature properly when planted at any time of the year. Beets, carrots, leaf lettuce, and Swiss chard are examples of all-year crops in Southern California.

Following is a monthly schedule of planting for home vegetable gardens for this area. The dates are approximate and should be treated as flexible guidelines which may vary slightly for coastal, mountain, and desert communities.

September: This is the time to begin planning for the fall-winter vegetable garden in Southern California. Prepare the garden before planting by spreading 2-4" of compost, manure, peat moss, or any other well-rotted organic matter evenly over the garden and spading in deeply. Next, break up or remove large soil clods and rocks, and rake garden until smooth, and level. The following vegetables may be planted at this time: beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, celeriac, celtuce, chicory, Chinese cabbage, Chinese mustard (all types), collards, cress, dandelion, endive, kale, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce (all types), Malabar spinach, mustard, New Zealand spinach, onions (all types from seed, set, or transplants), parsley, parsnips, peas (all types), potatoes (from seed-potato pieces), radishes, rutabagas, shungiku (Oriental edible chrysanthemum), spinach (common type), Swiss chard, Tampala spinach, turnips, garlic, shallots, and cloves.

October-November: Continue planting cool-season vegetables from seed, sets, or transplants. To space out harvest over a longer period, sow or set out vegetables one row at a time at two-week intervals. Plant fast-growing "catch" crops like radishes or cress between slow-maturing vegetables like cabbage to make maximum use of garden space. Dig and divide crowded artichoke

plants, selecting offshoots of the most vigorous plants. Strawberry runners may be removed and replanted in rows at this time. With recently planted seed and transplants, keep soil constantly moist and be ready to water daily during autumn hot spells. Watch for curled or deformed new leaves on cabbage and its relatives, telltale signs of aphid infestation. These prolific sucking insects can be controlled by spraying or dusting vegetables with Rotenone/Pyrethrum, Malathion, or Diazinon. Established vegetables will benefit from a light application of liquid or granular fertilizer at this time.

December-January: In addition to planting cool-season crops from seed and transplants, this month is also the time to purchase and plant the perennial fruits and vegetables from bare-root stock. These include artichoke, asparagus, grapes, horseradish, blackberry, raspberry, strawberry, rhubarb, and deciduous fruit trees. Add generous amounts of organic material to soil before planting, and allow sufficient space between plants to avoid crowding later on.

February: This is the last month to plant cool-season crops like broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, kale and collards from transplants. Root crops like turnips, beets, carrots, radishes, and leafy lettuce may still be planted from seed. Bare-root perennials may still be planted (where available). Reduce competition from weeds in the garden by cultivating shallowly around vegetables and mulching with a layer of compost, wood shavings, or other coarse organic material over the surface of the garden.

March: This month begin planning for the spring-summer vegetable garden. Start seed indoors (in shallow containers, or fiber peat pots) of tomatoes, peppers, melons, squash, eggplant, and cucumber for setting out in the garden in May. Continue to plant seed as in February, and if warm, dry weather occurs, begin to sow seeds of sweet corn and snap beans in the ground. Begin planting tubers of Jerusalem artichoke or "sunchoke" this month as they become available. Although not an artichoke, the sunchoke is a big perennial which produces edible tubers and beautiful daisy-like flowers.

April-May: This is the time to sow seed or set out transplants of the warm season vegetables: beans (soy, snap, lima, Chinese long beans, etc.), black-eyed cowpeas, carrots, sweet corn, cucumber, eggplant, endive, gourds (all types), ground cherry or husk tomato, lettuce (loose leaf varieties), Malabar spinach, muskmelon or cantaloupe, New Zealand spinach, okra, peanuts, peppers (all types), pumpkins, radishes, squash (all types), sunflower, sweet potatoes, tomatoes (all types), tomatillos, and watermelons.

June-July: Make successive sowings of beans and corn until the first of July. Continue to sow seed of beets, Swiss chard, carrots, and radishes. Watering and weed-control will require special attention with the onset of hot weather. To extend the harvest of crops such as beans, peppers, eggplant, and squash, harvest the vegetables on a day-to-day basis. Watering by slow, deep irrigation and applying a surface mulch to the garden will substantially reduce the frequency of watering during hot summer weather.

August: This month give top priority to harvesting, watering and pest control. Remove all dead or diseased foliage and provide support for crops or plants heavy with fruit. Begin planning now for the fall-winter garden by starting cool-season vegetables from seed in shallow containers or peat pots to set out in the garden in late September. If space permits, many warm-season vegetables may be left in to produce until the onset of cold temperatures.

Additional information can be obtained at:
Los Angeles State and County Arboretum - 681-8411,
Descanso Gardens - 790-5571,
South Coast Botanic Garden - 772-5813.